

Governors took their pitch for Chesapeake-related cash to Congress—and at least one congressman took the issue to the White House—as leaders continued their scramble in March to secure federal support for the Bay cleanup.

But they increasingly acknowledged that the region is unlikely to be able to do anything more than maintain existing funding levels—or get incremental increases—for Bay-related programs.

Governors from the Bay states, as well as many lawmakers from the region, had hoped to secure \$1 billion or more in new funding for the Bay in the 2006 fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1.

“In a perfect world, that would be a solution we’d love to see,” Virginia Gov. Mark Warner told reporters after meeting with Congress members. “But we have to work with the hand we’re dealt.”

Ehrlich described seeking incremental increases as “operating in the realm of the doable.”

The billion-dollar boost was not in President Bush’s budget when it was released in early February. The proposed budget, in fact, eliminated funding for many of the Bay-related projects that had been added for this year by Congress.

Warner, Ehrlich and District of Columbia Mayor Tony Williams visited senators and House members from the region March 1 to make their case for Bay funding. They had pledged at the Jan. 10 Executive Council meeting to lobby Congress within 45 days to seek cleanup money.

The lobby effort was in response to a report by the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Blue Ribbon Finance Panel, appointed by the Executive Council, which last fall called for a \$15 billion fund to pay for the Bay cleanup. It called for \$12 billion to come from the federal government over six years, and the rest from the states.

Both Virginia and Maryland have passed legislation in the past two years to increase spending on Bay-related programs.

Virginia Sen. John Warner, R-VA, said that with proposed budget reductions, the federal government was “sliding backward. ...The governors and mayor not only came here personally, but they bring real money to the table.” He said the federal government should at least match the local money on the table.

In a private meeting, senators from the region told the governors they were unlikely to get an additional \$12 billion from Congress in coming years, and that it would be a struggle to maintain current funding levels with tight spending caps aimed at controlling the budget deficit.

The governors indicated that with an additional \$3 billion to \$4 billion, the states could go a long ways toward meeting the Bay’s water quality goals.

After meeting with the senators, and a separate meeting with House members from the region, the lawmakers and governors agreed to send separate letters to chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees—which will actually write the spending bills for 2006—identifying specific programs where they would like to see funding boosts.

“We have a significant bipartisan delegation here today, and all of us are prepared to work together to do what must be done to make improvements to one of our nation’s most treasured natural resources,” said Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-MD, after the meeting. “We must be prepared to step up the federal investment to support the programs and policies that will help us to achieve our goal.”

In their letter, Warner, Ehrlich, Williams, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, and Pennsylvania state Sen. Mike Waugh, the chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, which represents state legislatures, called the Bay “a national treasure that warrants a significant federal investment to restore its bounty and water quality.”

They outlined recent actions by each jurisdiction to increase funding and urged the

appropriators “in a spirit of partnership” to work with the region.

The letter was accompanied with a document outlining specific program-by-program budget requests for everything from blue crab research and small watershed grants to increased farm bill funding and more money for wastewater treatment plants.

The Bay region’s House and Senate members were also preparing letters to their respective appropriations committees requesting stepped-up funding for Bay-related programs.

Meanwhile, Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, R-MD, said he was asked about the Bay cleanup effort by President Bush after a recent White House meeting about Social Security. Gilchrest said he told the president that “restoring full funding in this year’s budget was critical in not losing any momentum on the issue.”

The congressman said that Bush remarked that he enjoyed fishing on the Bay, and Gilchrest invited the president for a trip on the Chesapeake to see some of its problems, and splendor.